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The War of 1939-1945

Jockeying for Position

When the European war broke out in September, 1939, the conditions in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were not dissimilar. In each country a semi-dictatorial government, primarily responsible to the monarch, ruled with the assent of a subservient parliament. The predominantly agrarian masses were discontented with both political and economic conditions but were inarticulate and ineffectively organized. While all former political parties had been officially dissolved, their members continued to carry on a half-concealed activity beneath the eyes of the censor and the political police. The economy of each country was tied, in the main, to Germany's; although in Bulgaria, Great Britain and France made a pretense at counteracting German influences, they had apparently abandoned Yugoslavia to the Axis. In foreign relations both governments officially pursued a policy of neutrality, while their ministers and rulers made open or surreptitious visits to Hitler or his henchmen. German "tourists" ceaselessly worked in each country for the benefit of the German Reich.

Beneath the surface, however, there were forces which caused Bulgaria and Yugoslavia to take different courses when the crucial test came. In Yugoslavia resistance to collaboration with the Axis sprang up the minute the government capitulated. In Bulgaria, on the other hand, the government was able to swing the country into the Axis camp and keep it there until the triumph of the United Nations and particularly Russia made it clear that the Axis was losing the war.

As late as February, 1940, the Bulgarian government[5] assured the members of the Balkan Entente that it would not press its revisionist claims while the war lasted. With the dismemberment of Romania, however, in the summer of 1940, Bulgaria considered itself absolved of this pledge and in September obtained Southern Dobruja, thus regaining the boundary of 1912. Although Romania and Hungary were persuaded in November to adhere to the Tripartite Pact of Germany, Italy, and Japan, and despite the fact that over 80 per cent of Bulgaria's trade was now being carried on with Germany, the tsar and his government refused to join the Axis. Russia, whose agreement with the Reich in August, 1939, had undoubtedly helped to confuse the Bulgarian people, may have had something to do

[5] In well-managed elections, January, 1940, the government obtained a *sobranje* composed of 140 supporters and 20 opponents of whom 9 were Communists. A new government, organized on February 16, was headed by Bogdan Filov who remained premier until he entered the Regency Council in September, 1943.

643 compelled him to take this step is characteristic not only of the high spirit of public duty which inspires his acts, but also of the consciousness of his responsibilities when in charge of public affairs. One or two sentences of the speech, suffice to portray the man. „It is," M. Gheorghiev declared, „a nefarious act to allow the public to perceive that the State shows partiality in its treatment of its subjects, and to favour some unduly at the expence of others... The sense of justice is being blunted, and such acts must cease"... and as they did not cease, M. Gheorghiev turned his back on his former colleagues and resigned, while the latter persevered in their campaign of spoliation and embezzlement.

645 663 As for M. Peter Todorov, the writer has nothing to alter in the opinion he expressed of him in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* on Oct. 6, 1923, the object of which was to correct and mitigate the erroneous impressions the British public was forming of events in Bulgaria owing to the reports of some three misinformed Labour members of Parliament, who had then visited the country. This appreciation of M. Todorov was couched in the following terms: „No words would adequately express the esteem in which he is rightly held by those who have the privilege to know him. His unsparing denunciation of the abuses committed by the former Agrarian government and his scathing exposures of shady affairs are the best proof of his unswerving devotion to high ideals. As long as M. Todorov remains in the Cabinet there can be no fear of Bulgaria pursuing a reactionary policy". To the above may be added M. T. G. Vlaikov's appreciation, so that it may not be thought that such flattering remarks are inspired by the personal esteem the writer cherishes for one of the most stalwart champions of true radicalism in Bulgaria. M. Vlaikov is a distinguished writer, and a political thinker who until lately had played an active and reputable part

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in the social life of his country, and which may be likened to the role of the late much-regretted Charles Masterman in England. In his latest book, „Functionaries and Rulers" in which he related the rich and variegated experiences of his defunct brother in his capacity of a public functionary, and depicts in vivid colours the gradual deterioration of public morals, he lays stress on the fact, that, M. Todorov, on becoming Minister of Finances in 1923 startled all those about him by resolutely insisting that all functionaries in his department should be protected against dismissal and replacement by favourites and friends of the regime in power. That he worked with all possible zeal to render tenure of office secure for functionaries; this uncertainty as to their stability of employment being a veritable bane, and the main cause of maladministration in all Balkan countries. For a whole year there were no changes in the staff and the law relative to the appointment of functionaries in the Ministry of Finance was altered so that no one could be dismissed without the decision of a special disciplinary committee. Thus a dam against favouritism and political corruption had been effectively erected, but, M. Vlaikov, adds, no sooner had M. Todorov evacuated his post, that vents were made in the dam and soon the whole good work was undone. This shows how essential it is to have good men at the top, and all Bulgarians will readily agree that M. Todorov, in his capacity of Finance Minister has so far shown himself a very Cerberus on guard before the public purse, ready to defend it tooth and nail against dilapidations. Changes have occurred during this year (1935) in the composition of the Bulgarian Government, but the successors of M. Gheorghiev have all declared that their programme is identical to that of their predecessors and that they will pursue unflinchingly the task of purifying public life. All good-wishers of Bulgaria should wish them therefore success, for this is a pressing need.

631 663 no government had ever decided to apply such a programme of retrenchment voluntarily and deprive itself of the privilege which the dispensation of posts brought to it. For it must not be forgotten that the politicians held the electorate by the hope of office and the civil service by fear of dismissal from their posts.

645 663 Another administrative reform was a decrease in the number of Ministries. That of railways, posts and telegraphs, has been merged with that of Public Works into a Ministry of Communications, while those of Agriculture, and of Commerce and Industry have been fused into the Ministry of National Economy. This change will not only effect an economy in the personnel, but will obviate the necessity of duplicating similar work and services and generally simplify and expedite the work of the institutes. While the placing of the Ministries of Industry and Agriculture under the same management will greatly facilitate the work of reconciling rival and often contradictory policies, which hitherto prevented the adoption of a rational general plan. Cuts and economies were effected in all branches of the administrations, the Ministers themselves setting the example by reducing their salaries by 50 %, an example which was followed by managers of both State and private banks and other institutions.

663 475 216 On July 12, 1934 less, than two months from his assuming power, M. Kimon Gheorghiev announced in a public speech that his government had licensed 6220 public functionaries and effected economies in the budget amounting to a minimum of 385 million leva. The efficiency with which the work of overhauling the functioning of the administration was carried out may be gauged by the report on the management of the Pernik coal mine, which is an autonomous institution under State control. The new directors found that the former Agrarian Minister Ghitsev, under whose province came the supervising of